

Message Text

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EO 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: COMMENTS ON PRIMI MINISTER CARAMANLIS OCT 16
SPEECH

REFS: (A) ATHENS 8001; (B) ATHENS 8016

1. THERE WERE NO REAL SURPRISES IN PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS OCT 16 SPEECH TO THE GREEK PARLIAMENT (REF-TELS). IN A CLEAR, FORCEFUL AND CONFIDENT MANNER, HE OUTLINED THE PRESENT SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY AND GAVE HIS GOVERNMENTS POSITION ON THE KEY ISSUES FACING GREECE. HE ADDRESSED THE GREATER PART OF HIS REMARKS TO FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES BECAUSE, AS HE PUT IT, "THEY ARE THE MORE SERIOUS ONES."

2. AS ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS, CARAMANLIS ONCE AGAIN STATED THAT GREECE BELONGS TO THE WEST. HE REPEATED THAT THE CYPRUS TRAGEDY LED TO GREECE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE MILITARY SIDE OF NATO BUT THAT IF THE REASONS FOR THIS ACTION ARE REMOVED, THEN GREECE CAN REEXAMINE ITS POSITION TOWARD THE ALLIANCE. MEANWHILE, HOWEVER, AND DESPITE
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THE SUI GENERIS RELATIONSHIP GREECE IS SEEKING TO ACHIEVE

IN ITS NEGOTIATIONS WITH NATO, IT IS CLEAR FROM WHAT CARAMANLIS SAID THAT GREECE DESIRES THAT ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH NATO REMAIN A CLOSE ONE.

3. CARAMANLIS WAS FAIRLY BRIEF IN DISCUSSING THE QUESTION OF US BASES. HE DESCRIBED GREECE'S OBJECTIVES IN OUR BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS ALONG FAMILIAR TERMS (AND WAS LOUDLY APPLAUDED WHEN HE SAID THAT THE BASES THAT WOULD BE RETAINED WOULD BE PLACED UNDER NATIONAL CONTROL). HIS REFERENCE TO CHANGING THE LEGAL STATUS OF AMERICANS

SERVING HERE TO BE THE SAME AS THAT OF OTHER FOREIGN PERSONNEL IN GREECE WAS UNCLEAR, HOWEVER, ESPECIALLY SINCE THERE ARE ONLY A HANDFUL OF OTHER FOREIGN MILITARY PERSONNEL IN GREECE. MOREOVER, THIS STATEMENT IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE EFFORTS TO DATE IN THE BILATERAL SOFA NEGOTIATIONS IN WHICH PRIVILEGES ARE BEING REDUCED BUT BY NO MEANS TO THE FLOOR REPRESENTED BY THE BASIC NATO SOFA, AS CARAMANLIS REMARKS IMPLY.

4. THE STATEMENTS MADE BY THE OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS FOLLOWING THE PRIME MINISTERS SPEECH DID NOT PRODUCE ANY SURPRISES EITHER. MAVROS, FOR THE CENTER UNION/NEW FORCES, AGREED ESSENTIALLY WITH MOST OF THE GOVERNMENTS POSITIONS.

PASOK LEADER PAPANDREOU, ON THE OTHER HAND, DISAGREED WITH ALMOST EVERYTHING THE PRIME MINISTER SAID. SURPRISINGLY, A HEATED EXCHANGE THEN TOOK PLACE BETWEEN MAVROS AND PASOK LEADER PAPANDREOU IN CONNECTION WITH AN INCIDENT INVOLVING THE TWO IN LAST YEAR'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THIS FURTHER CONTRIBUTED TO A GENERAL IMPRESSION THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD PUT ON AN EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE AND CAME OUT THE WINNER IN THIS MAJOR PARLIAMENTARY "DEBATE."
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